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SWW 6 file

29 March 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR:

Chairman, COMIREX

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SUBJECT: Strategic Warning - A Definition

In response to your verbal request for a definition of strategic warning and for an explanation of some ways in which an approach to the subject of strategic warning might be considered, the Strategic Warning Working Group has prepared this memorandum for your use.

The JCS describes Strategic Warning as:

A notification that enemy-initiated hostilities may be imminent. This notification may be received from minutes to hours to days, or longer, prior to the initiation of hostilities.

The JCS definition of Tactical Warning reads as follows:

A notification that the enemy has initiated hostilities. Such warning may be received any time from the launching of the attack until it reaches its target.

For a clear understanding of today's warning problem we do not believe that the widely used JCS description of Strategic Warning is sufficient as it is generally applied. It needs broadening and further development.

First, note that strategic warning is time oriented, not event oriented. There are many possible applications but the most important use of strategic warning is to warn of the imminence of a strategic attack by one major world power upon another. Too often, with consideration of this particular warning problem at the top of the warning scale, most thinking about strategic warning stops--stops because of a natural tendency to relate strategic warning only to strategic attack.

JCS review(s) completed.

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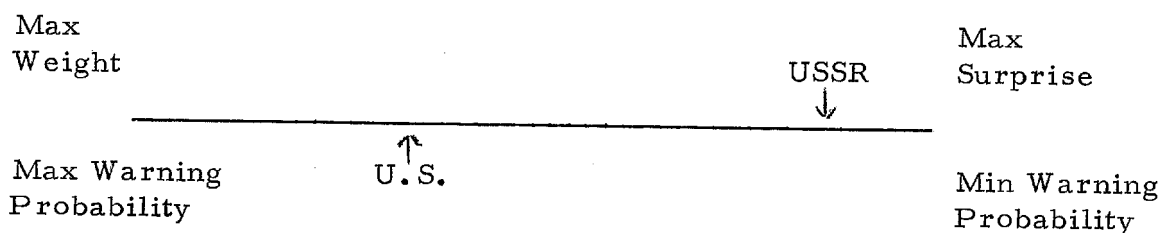


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(Strategic attack is defined as, "An attack directed at selected vital targets of an enemy nation so as to destroy his warmaking capacity or his will to fight.") In order to better relate strategic warning to today's problems, it must be considered to extend over into warning of situations where U.S. national interests seriously collide with those of the USSR, Communist China or other communist nations to such a degree that the danger of conflict exists. For example, a capability to warn of the imminence of the movement of Soviet troops into Romania or of a Sino-Soviet conflict of any scale or of a major flare-up in the Middle East also must be of concern to those responsible for strategic warning.

Strategic warning of a strategic attack by the Soviet Union upon the United States remains our most important warning problem. As we try to improve our strategic warning capability against a Soviet attack we are trying both to increase the probability of warning and to increase the strategic warning decision time. The probability spectrum has been set out for us by USIB. At one end of the scale we are given a good probability of receiving warning of a Soviet attack of maximum weight. At the other extreme we are given virtually no capability to warn of a Soviet attack with maximum surprise. The actual conditions would probably be somewhere in between.

Probability Scale



The Soviet game is to move its pointer as far to the left as possible in order to permit an increase in the preparations for and the weight of the attack--without, of course, at the same time increasing the probability of U.S. detection. The U.S. game is to move its pointer as far to the right as possible, thereby increasing the scale over which

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there is a good probability of warning, thus decreasing the USSR freedom of action to increase the preparations for and the weight of the attack. This same scale can be applied to events other than strategic attack.

Together with the probability scale, as we play the warning game we should consider also other scales or spectra. There is the time scale, the time that we first begin to get warning of probable action against us. At one end of this scale we can put the earliest political and economic indications--very long range. At the other end is the point where strategic warning runs into tactical warning--the point at which we have lost the strategic warning game.

Whatever the warning problem we are facing, whether it be of strategic attack or some other major event, there are these and other sets of variables which should be considered while preparing the strategic warning report. For instance, strategic warning usually will be a judgment based on piecing together fragmentary evidence from a variety of sources. It is not likely to be unequivocal, it is seldom readily accepted as credible and is always weighed against the existing political climate. One must orchestrate the variables to fit the warning problem at hand.

In sum, there are several situations besides strategic attack that could bring important or vital U.S. national interests into conflict with those of the USSR, Communist China or other communist nations. It is the responsibility of the intelligence community to anticipate these possibilities and by careful preparation of collection capabilities and processing procedures be prepared to advise, or warn, the senior levels of the government when such events appear imminent.



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